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ABSTRACT

A study was done of a program designed to suspend disruptive secondary school students from classroom activities in a high school 45 miles outside of Atlanta (Georgia), focusing on the role of race and gender. The school had had an in-school suspension program since 1986. The school population was 1,097 students (507 males and 590 females), with 189 Black non-Hispanic students (18 percent of the total population), and less than 1 percent other minorities. From a pool of students who had been assigned to in-school suspension over a 3-year period, 200 students were selected for the study. Information was obtained through interviews and questionnaires. Data from selected variables of race, gender, age, and current grade were recorded for the total group as well as subgroup data for female, male, Black, and White students. Other variables were entry, retention in grade, income group, special education, family status, and kindergarten attendance. Results indicate that Blacks more than Whites and males more than females were suspended. White females were least likely to be suspended from regular class schedules for reasons associated with discipline. A significant number of students cited teacher attitudes and conflicts among students as undesirable characteristics of their school. Students in free and subsidized lunch programs were less likely to be in the suspension program. The report includes 11 tables and 11 references. (JB)

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Race and Gender Issues: In School Suspension

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Running Head: School Suspension

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Race and Gender Issues: In School Suspension

Abstract

A program designed to suspend disruptive students from classroom activities was examined in one secondary school in a small southeastern city. From this investigation, a profile of 200 students in an in-school suspension program was developed. Career choices, subject matter preferences, desirable and undesirable school characteristics, gender and race were among the variables assessed. Results indicate that blacks more than whites, and males more than females were suspended. Also, a significant number of pupils cited teacher attitudes, and conflicts among pupils, as undesirable characteristics of their school. A significant number of students were also undecided about career choices.

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Race And Gender Issues In New Disciplinary Programs: In-School Suspension

THE PROBLEM

For some time now, suspension from school has been used as a final displinary action to separate pupils who were perceived as disruptive, from the school environment. Within the past 10 years school administrators have carefully examined this punitive, out-of-school policy. Many have concluded that such a procedure could be perceived as desirable by offending pupils who do not wish to be in school anyway. The suspension process allows them to be out of school legally.

During the period that school administrators have been examining this policy, several have introduced modified versions that eliminate the attractiveness of being out of school, and, at the same time enabled the schools to benefit from funding that is tied to daily pupil attendance. In-school suspension (ISS), has emerged as an administrative alternative to out-of-school suspension (Radin, 1988).

The ISS plan includes the assignment of pupils to separate study areas within or near their school during the regular day. Subject area teachers who would normally see these pupils in class (science, math, English, etc.), are responsible for passing assignments for the suspended pupils on to those teachers who plan and conduct the ISS program. Suspended pupils are made responsible for completing their daily assigned

work (Stressman, 1985).

Programs with well established procedures where pupils can earn readmission to regular status have reported some success (Jones, 1983; Sullivan, 1989). Those programs reporting the greatest degree of success provide assistance to the suspended pupils that addressed values, judgements, and the impact of their self-made decisions, as well as regular counseling (Streesman, 1985; Hochman, 1987).

The present study was designed to provide a broad base of information for teachers, administrators and student services personnel who work with ISS programs and those planning to implement one. As of this writing, too little research information is available.

METHOD

Subjects

The high school selected for this study is located 45 miles west of Atlanta, Georgia. The school enrolls pupils in grades 8 through 12, and has had an in-school suspension program since 1986. During the period of this study, the total school population was 1097, with 507 male and 590 female pupils. Of that group, 189 were black non-Hispanic, with less than 1% other minorities. In the total school population, 82% were white, 18% black, and less than 1% American Indian and Hispanic. Among black pupils, 10% were female and 8% were male. For white pupils, 44% were female

and 38% were male in the total school population.

Procedure

From a pool of students who had been assigned to in-school suspension over a 3 year period, 200 pupils were selected for this study. Information was obtained through interview and questionnaire. Data from selected variables of race, gender, age, and current grade were recorded for the total group as well as subgroup data for female, male, black and white pupils. Other selected variables were:

Entry

This variable depicted the grade in which the pupil entered that school system the first time. We wanted to know if "out-sider" status, or transition from one school system to another was a significant factor in this group's profile. Means were computed for this variable for the total group and subgroups (Tables II to VI).

School Suspension

Repeat I

This variable was an indication of the likelihood that this group or subgroup had been retained once in their school career. Means were computed for this variable (Tables II to VI).

Repeat II

This variable was an indication of the likelihood that this group or subgroup had been retained at least twice in their school career. Means were computed for this variable (Tables II to VI).

SES

For this variable, we divided the pupils into 3 steps. The low step included those pupils who were on fully subsidized lunch. The middle step were those pupils in the lunch program that were partially subsidized. The high step were pupils who were not eligible for subsidized lunch.

These SES steps are not comparable to commonly accepted SES categories in research literature. The entire school population could be categorized as low to upper-middle income. Families with incomes above upper-middle, constitute less than 1% of the pupil population. Percentages were computed for each step (Tables II to VI).

SED

We also wanted to know the extent to which pupils in special

education classes might display behaviors that called forth in-school suspension consequences. Percentages were computed for this variable (Tables II to VI).

Parents

This variable was described in 3 steps; children living with both parents, children living either with mother or father in a divorced or otherwise separated condition. Percentages were computed for each step (Tables II to VI).

Kindergarten

The state in which this study was conducted, had mandated that each school district provide kindergarten as an option for parents by 1988. Some counties had provided kindergarten prior to the state mandate, but many had not. Even after the mandate, some parents select not to send their children to this state provided level of schooling. Children who enter for the first time in grade one, however, must demonstrate through a standardized test that they have the required entry skills for first grade, or enter at the kindergarten level. We wanted to know, the extent to which kindergarten attendance might be a significant factor in developing a profile for this group or subgroups.
Percentages were computed for this variable (Tables II to VI).

Information was obtained from pupil interviews, and a questionnaire that they were asked to complete under the guidance of their counselor. Information provided by pupils on the questionnaire related to the following perceptions of their school experiences:

What is your career choice?

When do you enjoy school?

When do you not enjoy school?

What is your favorite subject?

What is your most disliked subject?

In what subjects are you doing well?

Pupil responses to these variables were recorded in percentages.

RESULTS

Of the 200 suspended subjects in the study, 59% were males, even though they constituted 38% of the school population. Black males were 8% of the school population, but 18% of the suspended group. White females, however, were 44% of the school population, but only 14% of the suspended group under study. Black females were 10% of the school population and 9% of the suspended group (Table I).

As profiles were developed, it appeared that the highest income groups and sub-groups had the highest percentage of in-school suspensions (Tables I-V). White upper income students displayed the highest representation (87%), of upper income students in the suspended group. The highest SES group were those pupils not receiving partial or full subsidized school meals.

The age range of pupils in the school was 10 to 18 years. The mean age of pupils under suspension ranged from 14.52 to 15.05. The mean grade for these pupils was 8.30 to 8.62 (Tables I-V).

For the group, the mean for repeating a grade at least once, was 1.6. The mean for repeating a grade for black students was 1.84 (Table IV), for white students it was 1.54 (Table V). Repeating 2 grades for black students displayed a mean of .48 (Table IV), as compared to a mean for white students of .04 (Table V). The mean for repeating 2 grades for male students was .50 (Table III), and .06 for females.

For students in special education, they represented 18% of the suspended group, with 34% black, 12% white, 21% male and 1% female (Tables I-V).

For male students residing with both parents it was 68% (Table III). For female students it was 57% (Table II); 77% for white pupils (Table V), and 33% for black pupils (Table IV).

All sub-groups had a high percentage of kindergarent attendance in their profiles, however, male students had the lowest (85%; Table III), and female students had the highest (94%; Table II).

As the subjects indicated career choices, subgroups and the total group was more "undecided" than certain (Table VI). For black pupils, careers in athletics, law, entertainment and the military were the highest ranking - in that order. For white pupils, military, mechanic, technical, professional and athletics were their ranked choices with significant ties.

Black male pupils displayed the highest career choice of any sub-group by choosing athletics (25%; Table VI). Their next four choices were lawyer, entertainment, military and professional.

For female pupils, professional, athlete, doctor and nursing were career choices in that order, with significant ties (Table

VI). Male students were equally high on athletics and the military, with mechanic next, followed by entertainment and technical.

Students appeared in agreement as to when school is enjoyable. The highest percentages appeared "when there are no conflicts", with the next highest "when the teacher is in a good mood" (Table VII). These same variables received the highest percentages when they were asked about school being disliked (Table VIII).

When students were asked about their favorite subjects (Table IX), and their least "liked" subject (Table X), math was the highest among the liked subject, and social studies the most "disliked", followed by math and English. Other high ranking favorite subjects were English, science, physical education and health (Table IX). Math received the highest "favorite" rating among black pupils, and science was highest among white pupils. Female pupils in the suspended group ranked math highest among favorite subjects, followed by science and English. Male pupils favored math, health and physical education and science, in that order.

DISCUSSION

From our data, it appeared that blacks more than whites, and males more than female are assigned to in-school suspension. Also, black females were more likely than white females to be in the suspension program. It is also true, that white females as a sub-group were least likely, when compared to other sub-groups, to

be suspended from regular class schedules for reasons associated with discipline.

As profiles were developed, it was revealed that students on free and subsidized lunch were less likely to be in the suspension program, than pupils not eligible for this program based on family income.

The suspended group seemed to represent equally all grades because the mean for grade was 8.5, and the mean for age was 14.9 (Table I). The majority of the pupils lived with both parents (65%; Table I), however, black students (33%), and females (57%), fell significantly below the percentage for the total group.

A major factor in school being enjoyable for this group, was their friends being there (Table VII). Students who do not start their career in a system (kindergarten, or first grade), could encounter problems with the academic tempo and style of the school, and with establishing friends. For the suspended group, the mean point of entry was almost the 4th grade (3.67; Table I) - a very critical point of change from early childhood to middle grades education in most settings. For white males, 15% did not have a kindergarten experience at all, while for the entire group it was 13% without this experience. Female students had the highest percentage of kindergarten attendance (94%; Table II).

We found it surprising that such a large percentage of students assigned to in-school suspension were from special education classes (18%; Table I). Black students from special education classes were almost 3 times as likely (34%), as white special education students (12%), to be assigned to in-school suspension. Female special education students were the least

likely sub-group to be suspended (1%).

Subjects under study also had a significant number of retentions with a mean of repeating a grade at least one time as 1.6 (Table I). Males as a group (1.77), and black as a subgroup (1.84) were more likely to have repeated one grade than females (1.17). There was a significantly greater likelihood that black students (.48), and males (.50), would have repeated 2 grades when these two subgroups were compared to female students (.06).

It was interesting to note that the majority of suspended pupils resided in homes with both parents (65%), but this was less true for female students (57%), and significantly less for black pupils (33%). For white students as a group, those living with both parents (77%), exceeded the group percentages.

It was also interesting to note that conflicts (fights, gang activity, arguments), pose a major factor in the lives of this group. Encounters associated with conflict is significantly higher among group concerns (Table VIII), and sub group concerns to the extent of 20 to 30 percent. The next highest concern - teacher's mood - was articulated by some as the teacher's attitude. A high percentage might be expected here because there is a likelihood that a confrontation with the teacher was a possible reason for their suspension. On the other hand, it might be expected that the teacher or counselor would approach the resolution of a conflict with a sense of fair mindedness and skill, and not display what students might interpret as a "bad mood" or "poor attitude".

Social events, trips and meeting with friends are important desirables - along with favorite subjects like math, physical

education and health, and science. The group and subgroups tended to negative value social studies. Results on this variable is probably less generalizable, but more a matter for an assessment of the teaching and content that is labelled social studies in this particular setting.

With significant national interest turning to testing, it is interesting that this group expressed only a minimal concern about this activity, when compared to other issues in this category. Black pupils expressed the least concern about testing (2%; Table VIII), the highest concern, though not significant, was expressed by white pupils (5%; Table VIII).

On the career choice profile, the highest ranking for the total group was being an athlete or going into a branch of the military. A military career can begin without attending college, and only some college is necessary for an athletic career - primarily because that is where professional teams do their recruiting. The most important observation to be made about this significant issue in this category is that such a high percentage of the total group (17%), and white males and females (18%), are undecided. This factor should call attention to counselors, that this group might be seeking a greater purpose for their schooling, but they are not finding it.

For reasons yet to be determined, black pupils in general and black males in particular are more often involved in school disciplinary processes than their white peers. This inequity has been documented for the past 25 years (Washington Research Project, 1975; Morgan, 1980). Several reasons have been offered for this apparent persistence. Three basic theories tend to form

the context within which reasons are given - the inequality, the culture gap, and the self-fulfilling-prophecy. The first suggests that school districts disproportionately distribute resources and assign inexperienced teachers to predominantly black schools. The culture-gap notion suggest that the status and values of teachers tend to be incongruent with those of minority pupils; this disparity gets in the way of communication necessary for social compatability. The self-fulfilling prophecy theory suggests that student behaviors are usually in line with what is expected of them. The implication is that teachers (both black and white), have lower expectations for black pupils' behavior than for their white peers.

More recently, in popular media, it has become fashionble for black writers to propose that what happens to black school children in particular, and black families in general, is their own fault (Wilson, 1987; Steele, 1990). This is a resurgence of the discredited theory of "blaming the victim", that was popular in the 1970's (Stein, 1971; Valentine, 1971). A major study by Lemann (1991), has placed the Wilson and Steele hypotheses in serious doubt.

TABLE I
School Population and In-School Suspension by
RACE AND GENDER

Sex	Race	In School Population	Number Suspended	% of School Population	% of Suspended Group
F	Black	105	18	10%	9%
M	Black	84	35	8%	18%
F	White	478	27	44%	14%
M	White	416	113	38%	59%
Totals		1083	*193	100%	100%

BY GENDER ONLY

MALE	BOTH	500	148	46%	77%
FEMALE	BOTH	583	45	54%	23%
Totals		1083	*193	100%	100%

* This total is less than 200 because all pupils did not answer all questions.

Table II
All Students
Means and S.D.
N = 198

Age		Grade		Entry		Repeat I		Repeat II	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
14.9	1.7	8.5	1.8	3.67	3.49	1.6	2.50	.39	1.58

All Students
Percentages

SES			Race		Parents			SED	Sex		Ktg
Low	Med	High	B	W	M/F	M	F		M	F	Exp
18%	7%	75%	27%	73%	65%	27%	5%	18%	76%	24%	87%

Table III
Female Students
Means and S.D.
N = 44

Age		Grade		Entry		Repeat I		Repeat II	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
14.52	1.55	8.30	1.73	2.76	3.38	1.17	2.05	.06	.43

Female Students
Percentages

SES			Race		Parents			SED	Kindergarten
Low	Med	High	B	W	M/F	M	F		Experience
16%	5%	79%	40%	60%	57%	37%	.02%	1%	94%

Table IV
Male Students
Means and S.D.
N = 148

Age		Grade		Entry		Repeat I		Repeat II	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
15.05	1.74	8.51	1.82	3.97	3.48	1.77	2.62	.50	1.79

Male Students
Percentages

SES			Race		Parents			SED	Kindergarten
Low	Med	High	B	W	M/F	M	F		Experience
18%	7%	74%	24%	76%	68%	24%	5%	21%	85%

Table V
Black Students
Means and S.D.
N = 53

Age		Grade		Entry		Repeat I		Repeat II	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
14.84	1.59	8.00	1.69	2.66	3.01	1.84	2.35	.48	1.50

Black Students
Percentages

SES			Gender		Parents			SED	Kindergarten
Low	Med	High	M	F	M/F	M	F		Experience
42%	13%	45%	66%	34%	33%	59%	.02%	34%	88%

Table VI
White Students
Means and S.D.
N= 140

Age		Grade		Entry		Repeat I		Repeat II	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
14.9	1.74	8.62	1.81	4.03	3.59	1.54	2.56	.04	1.61

White Students
Percentages

SES			Gender		Parents			SED	Kindergarten Experience
Low	Med	High	M	F	M/F	M	F		
9%	4%	87%	80%	20%	77%	16%	.55%	12%	89%

Table VII
Career Choice

	Total Group	Black Pupils	White Pupils	Female Pupils	Male Pupils
Artist	3%	1%	3%	4%	3%
Athlete	12%	25%	7%	8%	13%
Business	3%		3%	2%	3%
Doctor	6%	6%	5%	8%	
Entertainer	7%	9%	6%	4%	8%
Lawyer	9%	11%	7%	7%	7%
Mechanic	8%	6%	8%		10%
Military	12%	9%	12%	6%	13%
Nurse	3%		3%	8%	
Police	3%		4%		4%
Professional	7%	8%	7%	14%	5%
Technical	7%	6%	7%		8%
Undecided	17%	13%	18%	18%	17%

Table VIII
When Do You Enjoy School?

	Total Group	Black Pupils	White Pupils	Female Pupils	Male Pupils
When I can see my friends	9%	10%	8%	17%	6%
When the teacher is in a good mood	9%	10%	9%	6%	10%
When we have social events	11%	8%	12%	6%	12%
When there are no fights or conflicts	13%	16%	13%	15%	13%
When we take trips	7%	10%	6%	19%	3%

Table IX
When Do You Dislike School?

	Total Group	Black Pupils	White Pupils	Female Pupils	Male Pupils
When there are fights and conflicts	24%	30%	24%	20%	25%
When we get homework	9%	4%	11%	13%	8%
When the teacher is in a bad mood	14%	19%	12%	22%	11%
When the work is unchallenging	2%		3%	2%	2%
When we have tests	4%	2%	5%	4%	4%

Table X
What is Your Favorite Subject?

	Total Group	Black Pupils	White Pupils	Female Pupils	Male Pupils
English	10%	13%	10%	12%	9%
Math	27%	38%	23%	34%	25%
Health & PE	18%	13%	19%	8%	21%
Science	16%	11%	25%	14%	16%
Social Studies	5%	8%	8%	6%	4%
Spelling	5%	4%	5%	6%	4%
Vocational	2%	1%	2%	*	3%
Art	6%	*	4%	4%	3%

* less than 2%

Table XI
Which Subjects Do You Dislike?

	Total Group	Black Pupils	White Pupils	Female Pupils	Male Pupils
English	17%	18%	17%	8%	20%
Math	24%	20%	25%	22%	24%
Health & PE	3%	4%	1%	6%	1%
Science	9%	8%	10%	18%	6%
Social Studies	27%	28%	26%	28%	25%
Spelling	*	2%	*	*	*
Vocational	*	2%	*	2%	*
Algebra	6%	*	8%	4%	6%

* less than 2%

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